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## Himalayan Rangelands Ecology and Animal Production Influenced by Changing Social and Economic Culture in Northern Areas of Pakistan

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The XXI International Grassland Congress / VIII International Rangeland Congress took place in Hohhot, China from June 29 through July 5, 2008.

Proceedings edited by Organizing Committee of 2008 IGC/IRC Conference

Published by Guangdong People's Publishing House

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## **Himalayan rangelands ecology and animal production influenced by changing social and economic culture in northern areas of Pakistan**

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The pasture production system in northern areas of Pakistan presents unique features .The total area is consist of 6 .94 million hectares and out of that about 50% ( 3 .6 million hectares) is consist of pasture land as a major source of Livestock feed kept for food ,employment and economic securities by local dwellers .These pastures are found from 1200 to 4000 meters height in form of small patches and pieces .Only in few areas (Dosai ,Ghaunche plateau) summer pasture is available in large quantities but animals overcrowding in this season results in tough competition and overgrazing .Normally every village has its own common pasture land at high altitudes (10000 to 12000 meters) around the water channels ,locally called "Nallay" .During summer animals are moved from valleys to these areas (April to October) and during winter (November to March) animals are kept inside .From nutritive point of view these pastures are getting depleted each year due to absence of reseeding ,managerial control and rational use being the common land .Pasture land can be divided in 3 groups ,1) Lowland or Valley Pasture Lands 2) Dry and temperate pastures (1500-3500 meters) and 3) High altitude pastures More than 3500 meters) .Except the last one ,the first two pastures are always in deteriorating conditions because they are situated near the villages and Livestock herds frequently stay there during movement from one pasture to other .The grasses and shrubs are not only used for animal feeding but also serve as fuel .The High altitude pastures bears good condition they are available from June to October ,than animals are shifted to pastures near villages .The lactating animals are not sent for grazing to alpine pastures even during summer due to milk demand ; therefore animals have to stay on lowland pastures that are already starving from nutritive contents .Resultantly animals show shorter lactation ,low foetus weight and stunted growth in meat animals .The scarcity of nutrients has resulted



dwarf conditions (slightly bigger than goat size) in Frisian blood introduced to this area .The average milk production is not more than 2-3 Lit/d even in case of cross bred .The economic uplift due to trade through "Silk Route" with China and other countries has provided chance to increase the animal intensity as symbol of social status according the local traditions but the feed resources remained the same with out any improvement .During winter animals are kept inside and fed on summer feed savings comprising of leaves ,tree branches and corn stakes .In October , winter maize grains portion is collected for food ,roots are harvested bit higher than ground level and used for home fire and middle portion is stored on roofs and tress (See picture) used for animal feeding .It is clear in photo ,Maize stakes have been placed on trees and animals are grazing on extremely poor quality grasses (in insufficient quantity) and maize stubbles .The farmers want to have more and more animals but not sparing land for animals feed .The high earning from potato crop has economically forced the farmers to grow more potato and land for animals

feed is shrinking day by day .The increase in animal intensity is greatly affecting the pasture conditions .There is need to maintain equilibrium in both the activities to preserve the natural resources for future generations and protect environment from deterioration resulting from land erosion .